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Legislative Black Caucus Calls for Full Investigation of Inglewood Police Shooting

Sacramento, CA—Members of the Legislative Black Caucus have called for a full-scale investigation into the shooting death Monday (July 21) of 38-year old Kevin Wicks by an Inglewood police officer who is still under investigation for the shooting death of another 19 year-old man just two months ago.

In this shooting incident, police alleged that, Wicks was armed when he answered the door while officers were responding to a domestic disturbance call at Wick's apartment, but, but police have not confirmed this. Police reports state that officer Brian Ragan, who has been on the Inglewood police force for 5 ½ years, fired on Wicks in self-defense. Residents are upset that Officer Ragan was back on the job so soon after being involved in another shooting death that took the life of 19 year-old Michael Byoune in May. In that incident, Officers Ragan and Roman Fernandez shot at a vehicle that Byoune, Larry White, 19, and Chris Larkin, 21 were riding in. Byoune died from his wounds. The men were unarmed, but Ragan and Fernandez stated that they believed that they were under fire. The victims' families have filed a \$25 million lawsuit against the city and the department.

On Wednesday night in the unincorporated community of Lennox just south of Inglewood, another unarmed man was shot and killed by LA County Sheriff's deputies adding to citizen alarm and their outcry for further investigations.

Six of the eight members of the Black Caucus represent various legislative districts in LA. Headed by Chairman, Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas (Senate District 26), the Caucus has announced their intentions to engage various segments of government and the community to seek better ways to address the persistent and divisive cloud of alleged police misconduct.

"Our constituents are up in arms about officer Ragan being involved in another fatal shooting, while his role in the death of an unarmed man is still under investigation," said Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas. "We have to assure the public that all life has value, whether it is in a blue uniform or not. Officers have to be held accountable for acting in the best interest of public safety and not allow biases or emotions to cloud their judgment while policing our communities. Subsequent investigations of such incidents and personnel decisions must be transparent, credible and reprimands appropriate when necessary."

Assembly Member Curren Price, whose district includes Inglewood, expressed similar concerns. "While we recognize that police, like anyone else, can make mistakes when they have to make quick decisions in uncertain and precarious situations, because they are allowed to use deadly force, it must be the last resort. Death is irrevocable. We have to make sure that police are getting the proper training and administrative oversight if we are to keep the public trust."

According to a 1998 report by Human Rights Watch, "Police abuse remains one of the most serious and divisive human rights violations in the United States. The excessive use of force by police officers, including unjustified shootings, severe beatings, fatal chokings and rough treatment persist because overwhelming barriers to accountability make it possible for officers who commit human rights violations to escape due punishment and often to repeat their offenses."

In response to the outrage expressed by community members regarding the police shootings, the Caucus will take these actions:

- Initiate a meeting with the Inglewood Chief of Police and Inglewood Mayor Roosevelt Dorn
- Sponsor community forum "Days of Dialogue" involving residents and elected and government officials.
- Send a letter to Attorney General Jerry Brown calling for an investigation into the shootings.
- Send a letter to Senator Gloria Romero and Assembly Member Jose Solorio, chairs of the legislative Public Safety Committee, requesting a joint informational hearing on police involved shooting and misconduct.
- Initiate a discussion to determine the need for a Civilian Police Review Board or Independent Commission to investigate the Inglewood police department. #####